

Poletown Historic District
St. Hyacinth Roman Catholic Church and School
3151 Farnsworth
Detroit
Wayne
MI

HABS No. MI-275-7

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PHOTOGRAPHS

WRITTEN HISTORICAL AND DESCRIPTIVE DATA

HISTORIC AMERICAN BUILDING SURVEY
NATIONAL PARK SERVICE
DEPARTMENT OF THE INTERIOR
WASHINGTON DC, 20240

HABS
MICH
82-DETRO
33-1. Property Name

St. Hyacinth Roman Catholic Church and School

2. Location

Street Address: 3151 Farnsworth, Detroit, Michigan

St. Hyacinth Church is located at the northeast corner at the intersection of Farnsworth Street and McDougall Avenue. The St. Hyacinth School is located at the southeast corner at the intersection of Frederick Street and McDougall Avenue. Both buildings are situated four blocks east of the community's main commercial strip, Chene Street, and south of the Ford Freeway (I-94).

3. Classification

Building

4. Ownership

Archdiocese of Detroit

5. Representation in Existing Surveys

None

6. Description

The St. Hyacinth Church is considered to be the first structure in Detroit to be designed in the Byzantine style. Characteristic of Byzantine architecture are the extensive use of circular elements, such as the rounded arch and the domical roof. The building is rectangular in plan with a semi-circular apse at the rear. It has a red tile roof and multi-shaded beige brick walls. The St. Hyacinth School displays a Georgian Revival architectural style. It is rectangular in plan and constructed with a red brick. St. Hyacinth faces east across McDougall Avenue, a street which is locally indicated on signs as St. Hyacinth Boulevard. St. Hyacinth is set off from McDougall by a sidewalk. To the south of St. Hyacinth is Farnsworth Street. To the east is the church rectory. To the north is the St. Hyacinth School. The St. Hyacinth School faces north on Frederick Street.

The St. Hyacinth Church presents a gabled facade flanked by two bell towers. An immense rounded arch, that encloses three gateway arches, is approached by a monumental flight of steps. Above the large central arch is a row of blind arches. Above this are two more small arches. Corinthian columns are used throughout. Each of the towers are hexagonal. The two upper stages of the towers are decorated with louvered, rounded arches. The towers also have copper domical roofs.

A subordinant aisle section of the nave projects on each side of the structure. From this section, three confessionals extend on each side. Also, along the lower level on each side there are three pairs of rounded-arched stained-glass windows with a circular window above them. There also is a series of rounded-arched clerestory windows on each side. Near the rear of the structure on each side are entryways which repeat the facade in miniature.

The apse at the rear has two levels. The lower level has three rounded-arched windows, and the upper one has three pairs of rounded-arched clerestory windows. A corridor connects the rectory to the sacristy.

The interior of the Church is richly decorated to emulate St. Clement's in Rome. The interior is also based on the Byzantine style, which emphasizes the use of paintings and mosaics. For use in the altar, several mosaics were imported. The painting of the interior was completed in 1928 by Conrad Schmidt of Milwaukee. The water-based paintings simulate mosaics in the altar and represent various figures on the ceiling of each of three cupolas. Extensive use of Italian marble is made in the altar. Dark-stained oak pews, cabinets, and confessionals are throughout the interior. A huge Moller organ is on the second level above the entryway.

The St. Hyacinth School has monumental entryways enclosed within pilasters that extend above the large denticulated pediments which they support. Rectangular windows are displayed throughout the exterior. Dormer windows are above the roofline. Decorative brackets are along the eaves. A string-course encircles the building near the base. Brick quoins are at the corners of the building.

7. Significance

St. Hyacinth Church is primarily significant for its unique Byzantine architectural style. The structure was designed by Donaldson & Meier Architects, and was built in 1924 by Nowakowski Builders.

St. Hyacinth also has religious significance for its contribution as a spiritual and cultural center to the local Polish community. In 1907 St. Hyacinth was established as the second parish to derive from Poletown's original Roman Catholic Church, St. Albertus. It was named after a thirteenth century Polish Dominican. The Church's first pastor was the Poznan-born Sylvester Kolkiewicz. Later the Church served as the vicarage for Michigan's first Catholic Bishop, Stephen Woznicki. Today St. Hyacinth is the most active of all of Poletown's Catholic parishes.

The school, which was constructed in 1907, is also significant architecturally. Originally it also housed the church. The building's educational significance is evident in that over twenty-five priests have been ordained who once attended the St. Hyacinth School. The school was most active during the 1920's and 1930's when the school had over fourteen hundred students attending. The school presently enrolls over four hundred students.